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ABSTRACT

To travel is one of the greatest ways to learn about the world. It is the "getting there" that provides the learning experience, not so much as the destination itself. Education is also a journey, one that should last a lifetime, but for many students today, it is one that lasts only as long as they are in the classroom. In such short trips, many students do not see themselves going anywhere. The new paideia offers a means to allow students to once again find their way. Blending the successful elements of active learning and constructivism, the new paideia uses communication, empathy and community to overcome the issues that currently plague the educational system. Online and offline, the new paideia may be the solution to the problem of what is missing in education today. It brings to the classroom a learner community that uses leisure and technology to integrate course material into the lives of students. (Contains 19 references.) (Author/AEF)

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The New Paideia

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Abstract: To travel is one of the greatest ways to learn about the world. It is the "getting there" that provides the learning experience, not so much as the destination itself. Education is also a journey, one that should last a lifetime. But for many students today it is one that lasts only for as long as they are in the classroom. In such short trips, many students do not see themselves going anywhere. The new paideia offers a means to allow students to once again find their way.

Ideas From History

A seasoned traveler will often understand where the road is leading judging by where the road has been. Looking back down the road of education, the road may have begun in Ancient Greece, with Aristotle.

Aristotle felt that an important key to education was communication, and the ability to move the hearts and minds of those who were being spoken to (Neal, 2001). Giving students relevant instruction was both vitally important and successful for Aristotle. One of Aristotle's greatest students, Alexander (the Great) learned these lessons well (Popovic, 2001). Alexander brought forth the Hellenistic age, and with it paideia: the idea of lifelong learning. Paideia, was a journey of discovery throughout an individual's life. It created the world as a classroom and every day as an important and relevant lesson to be learned. Within paideia, learning was a lifestyle.

Looking up the road from Aristotle, we find Dewey. His ideas regarding educational reform are still influencing us today. Dewey believed, in a Hellenistic manner, that school should be a life long process, an extension of society within the classroom (Field, 2001). Dewey also acknowledged that progress was vital. Keppel (1990) noted, "[Dewey] taught us that the only danger confronting us is being closed to the emergent, the new, the manifestation of progress." If Dewey was correct, then classrooms in general, both online and offline have committed a folly in not changing significantly over the course of the last few decades. Classrooms are seemingly stuck in time without computer-mediated communications and in a world that does not value leisure.

The Destination

A positive attitude is important for success in any endeavor. If education is to create successful students in today's world, then a positive attitude must be created in these students. Creating this positive attitude will require teaching classes in a manner that is relevant to today's students. Connecting the classroom with the outside world will create a journey that does not start and stop in the classroom, but continues throughout life in the tradition of paideia. Here learning is a process, a journey that one takes, not a trip that one is taken on (Volman & van Eck 1995; Basile & D'Aquila, 2002; Hatcher & Hinton, 1996; Connolly, McMaster & Hatchette, 1999).

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A Start Down the Path

Some elements of the paideia paradigm are already in use in many classrooms. Active learning and constructivist learning models are used to help make the classroom an extension of societal elements. Generally the use of these methods is limited due to resources, but it is successful in presenting the material being taught to students in a largely holistic fashion (Lunenberg, 1998; Roberts, 1998). These instructional paradigms can peak the interest of students and encourage them to follow a potentially life long journey of exploration. Students starting on this path might likely find the journey it's own reward.

The dominant mode of instruction is still, however, an instructor centered model; one where information is broken into pieces that are easy to present and easy to assess. It is a cold and efficient process to deliver information to a large audience. The onus is on the student then to reconstruct the whole from the parts that are presented. Often students never succeed in this task and become uninterested in what is being presented (Lunenberg, 1998). Within this mode, the student is merely being taken to the destination, experiencing a cold and impersonal journey with the destination as the only goal.

Elements of the New Paideia

Blending the successful elements of active learning and constructivism, the new paideia uses communication, empathy and community to overcome the issues that currently plague the educational system. If used appropriately, more students may be encouraged to explore and enjoy their own personal life long journeys of learning.

Communication

Within the new paideia, communication is an omni-directional exercise. Everyone involved with the class has an equal voice (Roberts, 1998) that can be expressed freely inside and outside the classroom. Regardless of age, students frequently engage in social conversation. By the time a student is in post secondary education, they often spend an equal amount of time in social conversation as they do in the classroom (Neal, 2001). Instead of trying to control this communication, instructors should seek to use it to their advantage, seamlessly combining the discussion of social topics with classroom material at all times.

Empathy

Empathy is an important social skill, encouraging individuals to be responsible to themselves and to their community (Roberts, 1998). This is a skill that is encouraged in early childhood education and later in professional school. But between these two extremes, there is little use of empathy in the classroom.

Empathy seems to be an innate human ability so it is odd not to include it throughout the educational process. From birth, young children are seemingly able to have a "feel" for the experiences of others. Empathy in a classroom is vital because it allows individuals to gain an understanding regarding their own thoughts and ideas by experiencing the opinions of others. To gain the appreciation of other individuals in the class, students must first be encouraged to deconstruct their own ideas. The class then shares these ideas to arrive at a communal understanding of various topics and opinions (Burns, 2001).

Community

By sharing ideas, a community emerges. Communities are powerful tools that benefit individuals by providing a place of safety and belonging. Within the new paideia, this is a community of learners. Belonging to these communities requires only the open exchange of ideas and through these communities society becomes part of the classroom.

Once internalized, students as learners become self-directed to seek new ideas to add to the community and are rewarded intrinsically through these contributions (Hatcher & Hinton, 1996; Howard, et. al., 2000). Hobbyist and researcher communities are prime examples that these communities exist and work.

Fusion: Technology and Paideia

An effective way to look at various technologies, including computers, is to see them as extenders of human ability (Kritikou, 2000). The most important ability that computers can be used to extend in terms of the new paideia is an individuals' ability to communicate. In extending this ability to communicate, all elements associated with communication are also extended, allowing for the classroom to exist at all times and the life long journey of learning to continue non-stop.

Often computing technology is merely an add-on to the classroom and in this manner it is very ineffective (Strommen & Lincoln, 1992). The key to using computers effectively in the classroom in terms of the new paideia is to integrate them into the way students and instructors communicate within the class. From this point, all other ways and means of integrating computers into the classroom will emerge.

The popularity of email and instant messaging provide good examples of how technology can be integrated into the classroom. Students and instructors become available to each other at all times thus allowing for the seamless interfacing of the classroom and the outside world that was mentioned before. It is likely that with a bit of encouragement, students and instructors would find ways to include multimedia elements in their communication and before long, computing will become ubiquitous inside the classroom as it is outside the classroom (Burns, 2001; Rice & Wilson, 1999; Varvel, 2001).

Leisure – The Modern Paideia?

Judging by the amount of money that is spent worldwide on the pursuit of leisure, one would think that its influence would be far reaching. However, it seems that the reach of this human desire to play stops at the classroom door. Play is seen to be disorganized and primitive, not suited for the classroom that aims to teach the virtues of civil and ordered society.

When individuals play, alone or in groups, they learn. They become self- motivated and self-structured, able to take what they learned in the past and apply it to novel situations (Bower, 2000; Strommen & Lincoln, 1992). Today many of the toys that are being played with are technological. So again, not fearing progress, it would be wise then to bring this technology into the classroom and use it to teach students (Soloway, 1991). Using communication technology, students can "play" with ideas; creating interest where there was once none.

To affirm that these ideas for the road ahead are sound, we can look back at the work of Aristotle where leisure is identified as one of three forms of paideia (Kritikou, 2000). In play students can create their own knowledge as they interact with their peers, instructors and educational materials to arrive at ideas that they can offer to their classroom community (Roberts, 1998; Rice & Wilson, 1999; Seeler, Turnwald & Bull, 1994). At the same time as they play, students chart a personal journey exploring the materials presented to them.

Application to Online Classes

The challenge is to apply a way of life to a single course, a point in one's life. To accomplish this task, one can approach the delivery of the course as an attempt to create a habit. Starting from the first class, showing students how communication permits empathy, which creates community, is important. The goal of the instructor is not to make the course compete with other elements in the life of the student, but rather to integrate into them in an active fashion. Thus they encourage students to view the course as a place to make a number of new friends that are sharing the same experience for a time. Completing the course becomes a matter of working with these new friends to complete a task that requires the unique talents and ideas of every student in the class.

Application of the new paideia to courses that are offered online begins with communication of ideas among the members in the class in a free, open and supporting manner. Students and instructors alike share ideas and concerns, creating empathetic relationships between individuals. These relationships blossom into the establishment of the learner community that extends beyond the course.

Some number of social or leisure-like elements must be integrated into the course. In this formalized "play" students are allowed to explore the material as a group, gaining the advantages of motivation and self-direction that are gained by group participation. As students begin to play with material that is increasingly relevant to their own lives, their abilities grow and they become ready to engage new educational challenges. Without a social element being included in a meaningful manner to the course, the advantages of the new paideia such as self directed exploration from within learner communities will never emerge. A suggestion for this is to use email lists rather than requiring students post a message to a Web board or similar system in their first week. In this way the communication comes to the student in a manner that is more personal and akin to conversation. Rather than forcing students to go out to a specific "place" to meet and greet, every individual in the class will be able to communicate from where ever they are. Often for those who are online, this location will be from their email inbox.

Limitations

Online courses must however be wary of the issues involved with class size. It may seem to some that the upper limit to the number of students who can enroll in an online course is limited only by the capacity of the servers to distribute the material and the markers to mark the material. But in light of the new paideia, this is an oversight. The maximum number of students is equal to the maximum number of individuals who can be meaningfully incorporated into the learner community. Personal communication must be present between all members of the class and all ideas and feelings must be appreciated and used within the knowledge base of the learner community.

The other issue that should be addressed is that of the staff's workload. In an online class the only way that an instructor can know that too much work has been assigned is if the students complain; however, students are often too burdened by their workload to protest. Paying attention to the social activities and communicating personally with students should help address this concern.

Conclusion

Like the traveler at the end of the journey, the destination is often a chance to look back on the road that has been traveled. Education in general is facing a major dilemma as students are becoming less interested in what goes on in the classroom. Often citing that the material covered in the classroom does not pertain to them or is not enjoyable. They find themselves in classrooms that have not changed significantly from the time of their parents and all the while, society outside the classroom is evolving faster each day.

The solution for education is to follow society's lead. The new paideia offers a means of achieving this by using communication to create a community that goes beyond the classroom or the monitor. Students feel like they belong in a community where the material that they are learning is relevant and where they stand as individuals are important. Appreciating that learning is a process or a journey where the path taken to the destination is at least as important as the destination itself.

Online and offline, the new paideia may be the solution to the problem of what is missing in education today. The new paideia brings to the classroom a learner community that uses leisure and technology to integrate course material into the lives of students.

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